

University of Rhode Island Assessment Climate Survey Report March 2022

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Overview and Rationale

The purpose of the survey is to look at progress in the University's implementation of program-level student learning outcomes assessment and give guidance for future policies. Chairs' perceptions were chosen as a particularly useful indicator.

The survey was administered as an online survey to all URI department chairs (and directors of department-equivalent academic programs) in Fall 2021, following previous administrations in Fall 2018, Fall 2015, Fall 2012, and Fall 2009. The response rate in for this survey administration was 32% (n=35), which is substantially below the average for past administrations (56%).

Currently, the survey consists of 53 5-point rating items and one open-ended question. Two additional questions were added for the 2021 administration to understand the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on program-level assessment reporting. Survey content is organized into six major domains: (1) chairs' personal attitudes toward assessment; (2) institution-wide faculty attitudes regarding the value of assessment; (3) leadership commitment, which includes a peer leader commitment sub-domain; (4) infrastructure support for assessment; (5) department-level implementation; and, (6) university-wide implementation. A final item addresses chairs' perception of URI's progress towards developing a useful, sustainable assessment system.

Key Findings

There is evidence of forward progress in chairs' views:

- the value of assessment for their own departments remains high;
- infrastructure support for assessment is going steadily up;
- university-wide faculty norms have risen significantly; and,
- university-wide implementation has also risen significantly.

Significant item-level changes are consistent with those trends.

However, there is reason to continue to focus on enhancing forward movement: leadership commitment remains the lowest domain score and has not changed significantly from past administrations. A new “peer leader commitment” sub-domain, introduced during the 2018 administration, continues to receive more positive ratings (mean = 3.24) than the leadership commitment domain (mean = 2.55) in 2021.

This is the first survey administration in which the chairs’ modal view of URI’s current stage in the establishment of program-level assessment has moved up to “tentative commitment”, with administrative leaders perceived as committed and some faculty ready to follow (endorsed by 48% in 2021). The stage denoted “external commitment” received the second highest endorsement (36%). The perception of “full-scale effort” (13%) is creeping up from past administrations but has a long way to go.

While infrastructure support for assessment (enabling viable assessment reporting) and perceived peer norms (indicating general faculty supportiveness) are continuing to move steadily forward, leadership commitment to motivate assessment as an internally useful process remains a persistent stumbling block for chairs’ views of overall progress.

Recommendations

Recommendations based on these findings which are consistent with past findings and recommendations, include the need to provide:

- (1) more resources to chairs and faculty with assessment-related duties;
- (2) greater recognition and reward for faculty peer leaders who demonstrate and promote the value of program-level assessment; and,
- (3) visible and explicit incorporation of program-level assessment goals, results, and impacts into program review, strategic planning, and external promotion of academic quality.